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Beyond temporality:

Notes on the anthropology of time from a shrinking fieldsite

A 'normal' house is built to last for somewhere between eighty and a hundred years. At least, this is what my architect informants in the East German city of Hoyerswerda tell me. In their understanding, such *normal* life expectancy refers to any given building: detached private homes, communal apartment houses, or high-rise office buildings. This is how one builds a proper building. More specifically, this is how these architects have been taught to design them. This expected lifespan describes what anthropologists might refer to as the 'temporality' of these buildings. However, as I will show, such temporal prescriptions more often than not fail to stand the test of time, literally in this case. To anthropologically account for even such solid objects' (material) existence in (social and physical) time, we should embrace a lesson these architects from Hoyerswerda learned quickly following the changes of 1989: that times themselves might suddenly and most unexpectedly change. The actual existence of an apartment building in Hoyerswerda, regardless of its actual past and future, therefore remains indeterminate in the present, and rightfully – like other objects – evades concrete ascriptions of temporality. Before setting out the general argument of this article, let me introduce my informants further.

In Hoyerswerda's socialist *Neustadt* (New City), these architects have constructed a whole city from scratch by deploying the aforementioned temporal logic. The New City's construction process began in the mid-1950s and lasted until the ultimate decline of the very state for which Hoyerswerda was to become the second socialist model city. The socialist part of Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), had great hopes in its housing initiative. Like the rest of Germany, indeed, all of Europe and many other places in the world, the GDR's territory lay bare and devastated after World War II, facing an existential housing crisis. The – at its time, vanguard – construction of apartment houses solely with industrially prefabricated concrete units, so-called 'Platten' or panels, seemed to offer the much needed technological fix. At first seven so-called living districts, 'Wohnkomplexe' (in short: 'WK'), grew adjacent to Hoyerswerda's Old City. Later a total of ten composed the main settlement for the GDR's most important brown coal industrial complex. Hoyerswerda became the national *Miners' and Energy Workers' City*. During that time, the new, mostly young Hoyerswerdians continued to arrive from all parts of the socialist republic. They came to find both a job in the mines and a much desired modern apartment, with hot water from the tap and central heating. They came to inhabit a continuously provisional urban space of an ever-expanding city, the entire infrastructure of which – schools, kindergartens and district shopping centres (so-called 'Nahversorger') – was built with the same construction technology.

Altogether, Hoyerswerda's state-owned residential housing combine produced more than 350 different kinds of these panels, as a former architect proudly underlines during a tour through Neustadt. He and some of his former colleagues took me on this tour in spring 2009, towards the end of my eighteen months of fieldwork in Hoyerswerda, in order to offer their perspectives on the changes dramatically affecting their city. Standing in front of their former headquarter, the architect recounts how this

building – in the 1970s a state-of-the-art building in terms of air conditioning and construction method – was a few years ago transformed from an office building into an elderly-friendly apartment house, long after the urban planning unit had been dissolved. Nothing about the contemporary building recalls its former vanguard qualities. ‘At least it still stands!’ is the sharp remark of his friend, a cynical, recently retired construction engineer. He gazes over to living district number eight (WK 8), the first of the later added districts. I am told that in the 1970s, this district had the world’s second highest population density, just after a district in Tokyo. Throughout the last ten years it has been harshly hit by the city’s demolition strategies. The district’s former three schools have long been torn down; a school reunion later that year with more than a thousand attendants took place on the resulting empty meadows.

To the architects’ surprise, new houses are being built in this area: private property developments of single-family detached houses. It is a rare occasion to see cranes constructing rather than deconstructing human housing space in what the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning had then recently named ‘Germany’s fastest shrinking city’; however, what they build seems all the more old-fashioned, at least in architectural terms. And yet these new houses still entail a promise of a better future, especially so since a third of Neustadt’s apartment blocks have already been demolished, not after eighty or hundred years, as expected at their erection, but after only forty years and sometimes even less than two decades. This unforeseen dimension of demolition resulted from the bitter fact that Hoyerswerda had lost more than half of its population over the last twenty years. Neustadt’s population alone shrunk from

65,000 before the fall of the Berlin wall to approximately 20,000 inhabitants in 2015¹, a decline of more than two thirds.

For those who had invested their whole professional life into the erection of Neustadt, the unprecedented outmigration – especially of the young and well-educated – and the subsequent deconstruction of now redundant urban space came as a shock. Under such circumstances, the city's former architects were easily subjected to ascriptions of temporality, too, for instance, by the new local political elites; as their houses they were seen as being 'of the (socialist) past' and with 'no future'. The former experts, however, soon accepted this process of shrinkage. In ardent protests and without any so-called 'post-socialist' form of nostalgia, they advocated for a qualitatively better deconstruction strategy. Most importantly, the city should be 'un-built' not randomly, but from its outskirts towards the already alarmingly porous centre. In a renewed struggle between architects and political leaders, which had already characterised Neustadt's construction during socialism, they often urged for a proper development plan, architectural expert supervision and more experimental reuse and reconstruction approaches. In opposition to what they see as a rather mediocre, unsystematic urban management by the new elites, they argue that the city shall retain a certain cohesive 'form', and all reconstruction should follow a binding building code. Next to the influential, although similarly marginalised local cultural elite, they are the ones who most successfully challenge the city's 'evacuation of the near future' – to use Jane Guyer's (2007) felicitous term. In a city, which even its inhabitants often refer to as being of 'no hope' and 'no future', they force the local government to account for its lack of an urban planning vision. For that, they stage local debates on the city's future,

¹ Cf.

http://www.hoyerswerda.de/documente/Statistik/2_3_nach_Stadtteilen_31122014.pdf
(last accessed: 17.11.2015)

organised by the societies and clubs they founded for this purpose, and flood the local newspaper editors with erudite letters.

Despite these critical public interventions, they remain surprisingly ambiguous about these new private property developments in WK 8. On one hand, my architect friends are bound to criticise the post-modern aesthetics of these differently standardised, but similarly industrially pre-fabricated houses. On the other hand, they appreciate the hopeful sign that people are starting to build again in their city. Interestingly, they do not remark on the life expectancy of those privately owned houses. But perhaps there is not much to be said. These private houses simply seem to be unusually safe in a still deteriorating environment. Their presumed 'temporality' entails the promise of endurance despite their socialist predecessors' currently bleak fate. How is it that these detached houses are expected to stand the test of time more comfortably than their slightly older counterparts? Why are they seen to have a different 'temporality' at all?

Beyond Shrinkage, Beyond Temporality

Initially, I wanted to start this paper in living district number ten, which is the youngest Neustadt district. Or rather, which has been its youngest district. It is in WK 10 that the city is most intensely affected by the process of shrinkage. The WK's fate usually and most effectively incorporates the common narrative of decline. Factually, indeed, WK 10 has ceased to exist. Of the original 37 apartment blocks, only one remains today. Most of the streets in front of the demolished blocks have been demolished, too. Where the apartments once stood, new grass is growing; with nothing else remaining, it is hard to

picture their former impressive materiality. However, even this fairly self-evident outcome of large-scale demolition has not been as predetermined as we might think. Throughout the last two decades, WK 10 has seen many surprises despite the fact that its recent past has been all too suggestive of its rather dystopian present. For reasons that will hopefully become clear, I have chosen to start with an anecdote that adds one more surprise to this otherwise predictable story of post-industrial decline and shrinkage: the newly built detached houses in WK 8. With its help I aim to scrutinize the term 'temporality', particularly the temporal underpinnings of yet other – this time: anthropological – narratives, analytics and theories. These underpinnings comprise the more or less explicit temporal logics deployed in anthropological analyses, as much as anthropologists' own expectations, hopes, fears, memories and understandings of history and causation (cf. Ringel, 2012). I take it that they mostly come into play in the way we – as anthropologists – position the objects of our analysis in time.

To be frank from the start: This scrutiny stems from a general inability on my part to comprehend what exactly is meant when the term is used (cf. Hodges, 2008: 414-416; Bear, 2014: 18). What I have in mind are the many prescriptions of particular temporal characteristics (in form of specific historicities, futurities or temporalities) onto specific groups, situations, sets of practices, institutions and material objects as well as onto certain ideas and concepts. These prescriptions entail pre-theoretical or, in the case of time, metaphysical commitments (Moore 2004), for instance, to theories of causation, endurance and change. The objects of analysis, as I will show in more detail below, become thus easily envisioned as having a certain temporal property, which somewhat predetermines their existence in time. And we, by representing them, seem to know how time has evolved and is to evolve in and around them, and which turn history will take given that we can discern these properties.

I do not want to be too pedantic about the use of a term, because most analytic terms have theoretical pitfalls whilst still being heuristically useful. However, I believe that there is more to be said. For instance, Daalsgard and Nielsen (2013: 2) have convincingly urged us to clarify ‘how discrete temporalities can be studied and represented’. In contrast, I believe that to ascribe one or many discrete temporalities, recently referred to as multiple, multi- or poly-temporalities (Pels, 2015; Dalsgaard and Nielsen, 2013: 11; Birth, 2008; Knight 2014) is analytically misleading. As actual properties (or qualities, as both Daalsgard and Nielsen, 2013, and James and Mills, 2005, might have it) of the given object of analysis, they entail implications about both the object’s actual past and future, tentatively ‘truthful’ representations of which I find to be of a questionable nature given our discipline’s prominent methodology.

However, there are further reasons for rejecting ascriptions of temporalities. For one, especially in times that are widely perceived as ‘accelerated’ and ‘insecure’ (cf. Morosanu and Ringel, 2016; Daalsgard and Nielsen, 2013), many anthropologists voice their own concerns with time, and particularly with the future. By reproducing the hegemonic notion of acceleration or other dominant temporal regimes, such as the one of crisis, they might neglect forms of temporal agency variously depicted by their informants (cf. Ringel and Morosanu, 2016; Ringel, 2013; Friedman, 2007). But despite understandable concerns with the future, even our theoretical relations to the actual pasts (i.e. history) remain problematic. Many anthropologists still argue that more space should be given to the temporal dimension of the past (e.g., James and Mills, 2005) despite poignant critiques of the danger of ‘homochronism’ (Birth 2008). Kevin Birth sees ‘homochronism’ as a failed response to what Fabian’s *Time and the Other* sparked as the constant ‘linking of ethnographies to time and to history’ (ibid.: 3). And so we still find most monographs and articles, including this one, to start with historical

descriptions. Some of them reach back in time for hundreds of years (in Pels, 2015, for instance, the timeframe of modern futurism is 500 years) as if this would assist in explaining the present. What is the metaphysical grounding for such anthropological narratives of history, and what kind of histories are we to give our objects and subjects, for which analytical gains?

In contrast to a general historical approach (which differs from Hirsch and Stewart's 2005 pioneering redefinition of historicity) and for analytical purposes, I therefore propose a presentist perspective, which I want to be understood as an analytical approach to the world whose focus on the present vehemently opposes any determining role of the past. This approach mirrors Rabinow's inspiring 'anthropology of the contemporary' (Rabinow 2003, 2008). However, as I will show in more detail below, it is also already ingrained in anthropology's defining methodology of fieldwork. By strongly emphasizing indeterminacy, it convincingly accounts for the role the future plays in human lives. Whilst discussing the emergent anthropology of the future in order to rethink our discipline's relationship to the past, I advance this presentist framework and argue for an exclusively epistemological – not an ontological – approach to time. As I will show in the next section, when the term 'temporality' is used in an ontological and/or cultural sense (in a gesture to account for 'non-Western' ontological resistance to 'Western' acceleration, as recently done by Iparraguirre, 2015, or simply by depicting the Trinidadians and 'their' or the 'local' temporality', as in Birth, 2008: 7, 18), it distracts our attention from exactly the multiple and indeterminate kinds of agency that humans exercise with regards to time (cf. Flaherty 2003; Ringel 2016).

'Temporality' as Culture and Property

Most current anthropological approaches to time work with two different meanings of temporality, and my argument is positioned against both. First, temporality is often conceptualised as something akin to – or part of – culture (for instance in the infamous Sahlins-Obeyesekere debate: Sahlins, 1985, 1995; Obeyesekere, 1992; Borofsky, 1997; cf. Bear 2014: 13). This approach tries to create an image of a certain group of people adhering to a particular and often limited, homogeneous understanding of – and relationship – to time. Traditionally, we think of circular and linear or modern and pre-modern conceptualisations of time, whose ontological, homogenizing characters have already been criticised (cf. Howe, 1981, on Geertz, 1977, and Bloch, 1973). In Hoyerswerda's case such categorization can also be done with the term post-socialism, subsuming the city's present existence under the influence of its socialist past, thereby explaining its current failure with its inhabitants' presumed (cultural or ontological) 'being stuck' in this past.

Similar historicising temporal attributions, mostly vis-à-vis people presumably without history, have first been criticised by scholars such as Johannes Fabian (1983), Eric Wolf (1982) and Dipresh Chakrabarty (2000). However, as I hinted at already, these critics have arguably only given 'people without history' the history that others had denied them (see Birth, 2008). Recently, scholars rather attend to the heterogeneous multiplicity of temporal relations in any social arrangement (Bear, 2014; Ringel, 2013; Ssorin-Chaikov, 2006; James and Mills, 2005; Orlove, 2002). By that, they also open up the anthropological analysis of time for the future. They have, as Laura Bear underlined, overcome 'the sole focus on the past that characterized the *rapprochement* between anthropology and history in the 1980s' (2014: 3). I am going to discuss this with reference to the anthropology of post-socialism and its particular upkeep of the past as a

reference point for present analyses, which so forcefully contradicts the multiplicity of temporal attributions, logics, and tropes so easily found in my own presumably post-socialist fieldsite. In its vast variety, this multiplicity escapes a general attribution such as the one that is implied by ‘post-socialism’.

I also argue that by changing one’s temporal perspective on the present from the past to the future, we will necessarily remain presentist and are invited to replace such attributions of ‘temporality’ with solid ethnographic detail and with no loss in analytical clarity and interpretive power. By empirically indulging in my informants’ contested presents, my intention is not to give them a (non-, pre- or generally socialist) history, but to pay credit to the fact that they are more concerned with the future, and that neither they nor we can know how this future is going to turn out, or how – if at all – the past might have determined it.

What counts for the ‘culture’ of people, which is seen to entail a hegemonic temporality, also works for other objects of analysis. The second, although more implicit and subtle meaning of temporality thus occurs when it is perceived as a property of any such object. As most dictionaries agree, ‘temporality’ initially only refers to the more general ‘state or quality of being temporal’². In itself, this definition lacks heuristic or analytic value – indeed, things do exist in time, or space, for that matter. Many anthropologists, including myself, have used it precisely in this vein in order to underline that the dimension of time needs to be attended to, or for thinking through the abstract temporal logics of certain phenomena or tropes: the one of shrinkage in my case (Ringel, 2013), but also of hope and ‘no hope’ (Miyazaki, 2004 and 2010), crisis (Knight and Stewart, 2016), infrastructure (Bowker, 2015), landscape (Ingold, 1993),

² Cf. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/temporality and www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/temporality, both last accessed 17.11.2016.

plans (Abram and Wieszkalnys 2013); gifts to Soviet leaders (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2006) or analytical terms such as problematization, apparatus and assemblages (Rabinow 2003: 55-56), to only name a few.

However, there is a problem when we specify the term. As few dictionaries add: 'like spatial position, temporality is an intrinsic property of the object'³. If a certain temporality (e.g. a 'modern temporality' or the 'temporality of modernity') is then held to be an intrinsic property of a particular culture, group, era or any other object of anthropological analysis – from kinship structures to particular social relations, from social institutions to specific practices, from textiles and masks to whole buildings – the problem is the establishment of the specificity of this property of being temporal, i.e. to establish how exactly these objects exist in time.

On the one hand, we face the same homogenising danger as before. For instance, when Miyazaki defines the temporality of no hope, he thus claims that any situation of 'no hope' is subject to the same temporal logic, which fully pervades this situation. Similar to Ferguson's 2009 critique of neoliberalism, this prescription empties our analyses by making it too predictable. On the other, we ascribe temporal properties as if they actually existed: every landscape, for instance, in Ingold's view, has one temporality (potentially the sum of all events inscribed into it) and if I could comprehensively know this total history, I could see where the landscape is going, so to speak. Or I would know that a socialist apartment block from the 1960s will surely only cease to exist somewhere between 2040-60.

If we combine these two challenges, we see that any 'post-'ascriptions (post-socialist; post-colonial; post-industrial) implicitly impose and inscribe a certain temporal logic as a property by presuming that the object has a past – which is logically

³ Cf. e.g. www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/temporality, last accessed 17.11.2016.

implied in the prefix – and that its current existence is, if not determined, then at least conditioned or affected by it. But how can a whole city, region or era be convincingly characterised as ‘post-socialist’? Or why is a house in socialist modernity convincingly expected to exist for somewhere between eighty and one hundred years? Apart from the – in philosophical terms – still arguable fact that things, people, ideas and such houses do have a past, present and future, is this existence in time actually predetermined as a certain temporality in form of an intrinsic property would suggest? In contrast, I propose to refrain from such attributions as much as the use of the word ‘temporality’ in anthropological analysis altogether. I find intellectual encouragement for this in the philosophical theory known as presentism, and in particular in one of its current formulations in the metaphysics of time. For my purposes, this reformulation allows the inclusion of the future into my analysis.

My remaining argument thus falls in three parts, dealing with the anthropology of post-socialism, the anthropology of the future and the problem of presentism in this order. In conclusion, I will define so-called ‘temporality’ akin to Hirsch and Stewart’s (2005) take on historicity not as an ontological property, but as a thoroughly epistemic and social phenomenon. Throughout this paper, I echo my informants’ surprise about situations in which ‘objects’ – such as apartment houses – take on an unexpected temporal existence. I will add a short remark on why it is subsequently more important to explain endurance rather than change when approaching the issue of time from a presentist point of view and through the lens of the future (cf. Ringel, 2014).

My general claim, then, is that temporality should not be perceived as a given, innate, or intrinsic quality, but a matter of contingent and contested social practice. Since most of this practice is knowledge practice (i.e. representational and non-representational references to the temporal dimensions of the past and the future), I

propose to get the ontological musings quickly out of the way and follow an epistemological approach to time. This means that when we study 'temporality' it should not be taken for granted as a metaphysical quality, apart from the unsurprising fact that things exist in time. Instead, since rhythms can be disturbed, houses unexpectedly demolished and social relations dissolved, it is the work that goes into upholding certain temporal orders, structures and rhythms that should catch our attention (see Flaherty 2003). The permanence and the efficacy of temporal practices, however, has to be explained. In contrast to Hodges' stimulating call for a specific and consciously applied kind of 'temporal ontology' (for him a particular Deleuzian understanding of time; cf. Hodges, 2008), I here propose to sidestep this problem of ontology altogether. For an alternative approach (with a clear ontological basis, but a much more epistemological outlook), I find presentism to provide the most convincing approach.

Post-Socialism and no End

Johannes Fabian's 1983 critique of anthropological writing strategies scrutinises the assignation of temporal qualities in form of the positioning of others as 'outside' history. As he convincingly argues, ethnographic writing strategies have thoroughly political, indeed, ideological underpinnings as well as repercussions (Fabian, 1983). While I do not claim that current anthropology has not learned from his intervention, I still want to recount the subdiscipline's critical engagements with the term 'post-socialism' and its struggle with a similar positioning, the one of all things post-socialist as outside of 'normal' Western, capitalist history, constantly being stuck in its socialist past's enduring repercussions. I claim that the term fails to describe social reality in

Hoyerswerda, foremost because there is obviously more to a 'post-socialist' city than its socialist past, as many anthropologists have shown for their ethnographic cases (cf. Berdahl, 1999; Boyer, 2006; even Kaneff, 2003; cf. also Hann, 2002; Gilbert, 2006). Let me repeat the urge for temporal multiplicity (instead of multiple temporalities) with reference to the same kind of houses mentioned above, before taking the argument one step further. For that, I will have to construct a 'history' fitting to the broken, indeterminate and non-post-socialist narrative I advance here. This reference to the past fulfils its present purposes and is for many reasons selective.

Some of the blocks in WK 10 were only finished in 1990, when the so-called 'changes' of 1989 had already happened. During that time, the GDR had run out of financial means. On a visit to a freelance journalist in 2008, I could experience the results. At the downstairs buzzer, my interview partner said that they live on sixth floor. 'But there is no elevator; you will have to walk all the way up.' In contrast to all other WKs, he tells me later, the blocks in WK 10 feature unusual six floors. GDR building law usually demanded an elevator in every building with more than five floors apartments, so that the architects either built five floor apartment houses or much higher. But here an exceptional permission was issued. With a similar exception, even the quality of the concrete was lowered for this WK, as an architect had previously pointed out to me. Although the blocks' unusually porous material texture all too suggestively mirrors the increasingly precarious times of its erection, we should remember that the future for which they were built was still one of a glorious communist future. We would now presume that this relation to the future immediately changed with the fall of socialism in 1989/1990.

On entry into my interviewee's flat I recognize the typical layout that I have so often seen in Hoyerswerda. In the small kitchen, I am presented with a wonderful view

over the fields towards a nearby village. I should see the sunset – better than on Mallorca, my hosts underline passionately. Then they get out photo albums and I see WK 10 in its infancy: the trees, then only recently planted, look surprisingly small next to the newly finished blocks. I see photos of their two young daughters with their friends on a playground in front of their entrance. Even though the pictures are in black-and-white, you can see that the whole WK is well-tended. Now the journalists' daughters have both found jobs in West German Munich. Since most of the houses around them already stand empty and ready for deconstruction, the journalist and his wife are seriously consider moving to Munich as well. There are few job prospects here, and they want to be close to their children and future grandchildren. But they would miss the sunset, they said.

This could be the end to a common story of post-socialist decline. However, the journalist's story continues. He had been the official spokesman for WK 10 from 1986-1990, something like a mayor for the district's 4,500 inhabitants. Although 'his' WK 10 currently seems far advanced on the path to total demolition, he remembers that at least throughout the 1990s there was still much prospect for the district. Although many had to move away, those remaining were still fighting for the district. He remembers one fight most vividly. Everybody involved knew: the blocks' maintenance is key to securing their futures. As in GDR times, the inhabitants had volunteered to take over several tasks to avoid deterioration; one was to tend the surrounding green spaces. The cooperative landlord, however, in whose power it is to decide on the building's futures, opted against that: the outside taps for water were removed, and the green space maintenance outsourced to a private company. This post-post-socialist infrastructural change indicates that the historical process is more complicated than a simple historical narrative of decline suggests. Similarly, even though it, at first, was inconceivable to many people in Hoyerswerda that the youngest of Hoyerswerda's apartment houses

could be demolished, only over a long period of time did both inhabitants' expectation and urban planning strategies change in combination with an ever increasing and accelerating process of population shrinkage. The for long much appreciated WK 10 outpost, close to the fields as well as to a main federal road, was only gradually given up. It is not the political changes of 1989/1990 that brought deconstruction, it is a continuous and less determinate series of practices, events and contested decisions that led to WK 10's only retrospectively doomed (future) present. Its demolition was not predetermined. If the landlord had decided to answer the comparatively young, committed inhabitants' demands in the 1990s, WK 10 could potentially still stand.

As we can see, the story about how these blocks in WK 10 have overnight lost their futures and found themselves in novel, postsocialist times that had to lead to their demolition is wrong; although it looks like they were then set on the path to demolition, the story unfolds less determinately. And I do not even mention all the art and science projects (cf. below) that spurred hardly unrealistic fantasies about keeping a few blocks exactly for the purpose of maintaining them as free spaces for art interventions. Are these blocks then post-socialist or can their existence in each present be captured with different attributes – despite all factual fatal outcomes that only retrospectively acquired a quality of inevitability?

The anthropology of post-socialism faces many such temporal problems. Initially, it studied this kind of social reality under the trope of post-socialism as opposed to the paradigm of transition. Katherine Verdery's famous book title from the mid-1990s *What was socialism, and what comes next?* (Verdery, 1996) summarizes this period's important efforts against other discipline's blatant transitology (cf. also Bridger and Pine, 1998; Burawoy and Verdery, 1999; Gal and Kligman, 2000; Berdahl et al., 2000). However, the main analytic move of those authors was to question the powerful

prescription of a Western future to the dramatic process of rapid transformation. Like many of their informants, they barely doubted the influence of the socialist past on the usually failing post-socialist presents. To use Caroline Humphrey's apt phrasing, anthropologists of post-socialism were tracing the 'unmaking of socialist life' (Humphrey, 2002), particularly in order to argue against the prescription of a Western future.

In the early 2000s, the first doubts emerged regarding the term's general applicability. Verdery and Humphrey, but also Chris Hann and Don Kalb tried to answer the question 'Whither Post-Socialism?' by proposing a spatially larger approach, which re-embeds post-socialism in post-Cold War studies of globalisation (Hann, 2002). These scholars already posed the question, when this category would stop making sense, i.e. when the socialist past would stop effecting the post-socialist present. This influence was seen to linger in people's ideas and experiences, and with a new generation devoid of these experiences it would disappear (Hann, Humphrey, Verdery, all 2002; cf. also Haukanes and Trnka, 2013)

More recently, particularly scholars working in Ex-Yugoslavia have continued to problematise post-socialist anthropology's own 'challenges with periodization' (Gilbert et al., 2008; cf. Gilbert, 2006). They claim that post-socialist anthropologists face severe problems when trying to adequately position their informants in time. As a subfield of post-socialist studies, the anthropology of East Germany (Berdahl, 2009; Borneman, 1992; Boyer, 2001a&b, 2006; Gallinat, 2009; Glaeser, 2001; Ten Dyke, 2001) has been at pains to emphasise that such positioning always entails a political dimension. Daphne Berdahl and Dominic Boyer, in particular, have been increasingly critical about post-socialist anthropology's own predicament of being fixated on the past, a predicament that mirrored the temporal logic imposed by West Germans on their Eastern counterparts in a wider, post-Cold War ideological project (cf. Berdahl, 2009, Boyer, 2006).

In fact, East German post-socialist references to the socialist past, such as in the phenomenon of *Ostalgie*, East Germany's infamous form of nostalgia, are not a matter of a longing for the GDR past. Instead, they express otherwise denied and silenced concerns with the present (cf. esp. Berdahl, 1999, 2009) or even a longing for the future (Boyer, 2001a&b, 2006, 2010). Berdahl (2009), for instance, interpreted seemingly nostalgic expressions as remarks on the future because of the socialist past's distinct feature that – in contrast to the unpromising post-socialist present – it actually did have a future. The socialist past, she claimed (Berdahl, 2009: 87ff), continues to provide at least a rhetorical resource for imagining a different future. It assists local attempts to differently recapture the quickly evacuated post-socialist future. Similarly, Boyer's (2006) two phases in inner-German national temporal politics – first, the total devaluation of the East German past by West Germans; and second, the Western gift of its particular re-historisation – both deny East Germans a say concerning their own and the nation state's future (Boyer, 2006: 379; also 2010: 26).

Without devaluing the impact of the past on such debates, which is so well rehearsed by studies of memory, loss and trauma (for example, Antze and Lambek, 1996; Knight 2014; Haukanes and Trnka, 2013), I argue that it is important to reintroduce further analytic complexity by re-emphasising the temporal dimension of the future. As increasingly argued (Boyer and Yurchak, 2010; Gilbert et al., 2008; Hann, 2002; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008; Thelen 2011), it is time to specify in which instances the category of post-socialism remains of analytical value. The future might, as in my field-site, re-enter the stage of shared concerns through new problems introduced not by socialism's legacy, but by contemporary problems with, and processes of, de-industrialisation, a neo-liberally orchestrated globalization and long-term repercussions of German reunification. It is ultimately a combination of these problems, which shape in unforeseen and accelerating manners my informants' existence and subsequently the variety of temporal narratives they generate (cf.

Humphrey, 1998). Even more importantly: Whilst attending, as Humphrey convincingly suggested, ‘whatever other frameworks of analysis arise from within’ (Humphrey, 2002: 13-14), we encounter an endless variety of local concerns with the future. However, before they can be attributed to a coherent, say, ‘temporality of shrinkage’, let me point out that even in high modernist (socialist) times quite similar predictions of a worse future had already arisen. Aforementioned East German author Brigitte Reimann, who lived in Hoyerswerda in the 1960s, noted prophetically in her diary in 1969(!): ‘The coal is coming to an end. In twenty years, perhaps, Hoy[erswerda, F.R.] will be nothing more than a ghost town, like one of these abandoned gold digger towns.’

Like Berdahl and Boyer, Andrew Gilbert et al. (2008: 11) thus envisioned the theoretical contributions of the studies of post-socialism in the following way: ‘If anthropology is the social science of the present, it ought to offer insight into the future *in the present*’ (Gilbert, 2008: 11; cf. Brandstädter 2012). However, in the post-socialist literature, this inclusion of the future usually takes the detour to the past. As Brandstädter writes, for instance, it ‘is in their orientation to the future... that postsocialist societies share a common predicament with their own socialist past’ (2007:132). Haukanes and Trnka (2013b: 3) also underline that while ‘much has been written about the past and present of postsocialist societies, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the interconnections between people’s past experiences and future expectations in these sites.’ In an otherwise convincing statement, again, we see the past being foregrounded in order to explain the present and the future. My approach in contrast scrutinizes how far we get when *not* reading relations to the future in the present through their presumed links to the past, but in their own right (cf. Knudsen and Frederiksen 2015: 3). This means that we sidestep what, following Haukanes and Trnka’s analysis, has ‘been at the core of anthropological analyses of

postsocialism', namely 'remembrance and forgetting' (2013: 4), in order to dislodge the analyses united under the otherwise productive comparative trope of post-socialism from its strong focus on the past.

Such approach fundamentally questions what, in her 2008 review of the anthropology of post-socialism, Buyandelgeriyn perceives as the post-socialist temporality of 'uncertainty as a state of dynamic being' (Buyandelgeriyn, 2008: 235), in which the socialist past at times manifests itself not by being 'evoked to serve the uncertain present' (which I would agree with) but because, for example, any new cultural state practices 'are directly related to and shaped by repercussions of the socialist state' (ibid.: 246) or because – in the domain of gender – 'the values and principles from socialism were able to appropriate, shape, and modify the... Western ideas and approaches' (ibid.: 243). If there is anything like a post-socialist epoch, I argue, it currently constitutes a new present demanding altogether new solutions for newly problematic futures. To be sure, the analytical problems of a certain past-fixation has not only been detected for post-socialism, but also in other areas of anthropological inquiry, for instance, in Melanesia (Rollason, 2014).

As I have pointed out before, in Hoyerswerda, we encounter such problems of periodisation with the emergence of a new dominant context: the one of shrinkage. This trope is directed towards a future that is rendered problematic. Contrary to some post-socialist scholars' usual expectations, my informants only rarely reference the socialist past; the local production of temporal meaning is less occupied with issues of former 'eastern' and 'western' Cold War politics (cf. Boyer, 2001a). As the future is at stake and widely debated in manifold local discourses, the socialist past only ever remains a strategically exploited (cf. Kaneff, 2003) and continuously scarce resource (Appadurai, 1981) amongst other concerns and other resources. Despite its dystopian undertones,

the context of shrinkage is often productive and challenging instead of disempowering precisely because of the fact that it enforces a relationship to the future.

This process has long overcome what we might perceive as the post-socialist context: On entering Hoyerswerda these days, there is another abandoned building, which does not fit the post-socialist narrative from above. Built several years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the local Burger King branch stands as empty as its formerly socialist architectural contemporaries. Shrinkage does not stop in front of even younger constructions. Indeed, so many other post-socialist developments such as small shopping centres, office buildings and a whole business park at Hoyerswerda's outskirts are abandoned, too. The link between the past and the future is not as straightforward as we might believe, but how can we account for this indeterminacy theoretically?

Problems with the Anthropology of the Future

My own response to the anthropology of post-socialism's inherent danger of a past-fixation is to substitute the perspective from the past with that of the future, thereby closely following my informants' strategy. I claim that areas of inquiry such as post-socialism can profit from the still emergent and unsurprisingly fashionable anthropology of the future (e.g. Pelkmans, 2003; Pedersen, 2012). I will point to a few problems of this body of literature before discussing the philosophical concept of presentism. I do so in order to underline what kind of analytical and empirical object the future in anthropology is, and which repercussions such conceptualisation has for our approach to the past, and time more generally.

First attempts to reconsider the dominance of the past in the discipline of anthropology, particularly following the historical turn, appeared in 1992 with two

hugely influential publications: Nancy Munn's seminal article on 'The Cultural Anthropology of Time' and Alfred Gell's inspiring monograph on *The Anthropology of Time*. As Munn specifies, whilst 'people operate in a present that is always infused... with pasts and futures' (Munn, 1992: 115), especially 'futurity is poorly tended as a temporal problem... in contrast to the close attention given to 'the past in the present'' (Munn, 1992: 116). However, the future – arguably more so than the past, since it is always only *not yet* – inherently depends on being represented in the present, which poses an analytical as much as a methodological problem. How is one to study the future?

As Barbara Adam had emphasised in her explicitly presentist approach two years earlier, '[a]ny reality that transcends the present must itself be exhibited in it' (Adam, 1990: 38). Gell similarly defines the future as 'inaccessible except as a representation, an imaginary present' (Gell, 1992: 288, cf. also 237-241). Bamby Schieffelin supports this point by underlining that the abundance of relations to the future proves that the future – as 'the most unknown of the temporal dimensions' – 'has to be marked in the present' (both Schieffelin, 2002: 12). In fact, the ethnographic material collected in the present – or presence – of the ethnographer is all there is 'of the future' at any given time. And what counts for one temporal dimension, should, if we follow Adam's advice properly, also count for the other.

In Hoyerswerda as elsewhere, there is no shortage of temporal material, especially not concerning the future. As Rosenberg and Harding in their edited volume on the *Histories of the Future* state, the current 'remarkable proliferation of words and images about the future' (2005: 3) is linked to a 'swirl of uncertainty', due to which futures have even become 'overdetermined' (Rosenberg and Harding 2005: 4). A city with 'no future' is exactly a place for studying such overdetermination, since the future has been existentially rendered problematic. Methodologically, however, rather than

asking how to study the future, I have to pose the question how does one study contemporary *knowledge* about it? As Jane Guyer asks, 'What kind of 'stories' does imagination create when the reference points lie in the future?' (Guyer, 2007: 417).

The focus on the future as an epistemic phenomenon stems from the problem that the future does *not* exist. Or rather that it only ever exists *not yet* (Bloch, 1959 [1986]). Anthropologists, more so than, say, historians, I argue, can take refuge in theories of indeterminacy and contingency to counter this problem. These concepts help us to turn this analytic vice of the future into a virtue, welcoming the unpredictability of the future and the subsequent under- or indeterminateness of the present (cf. Nielsen 2011, 2014). As I have shown elsewhere (Ringel, 2012, 2014), in Hoyerswerda the representation of the temporal dimension of the yet-to-come in an indeterminate present entails a variety of different ethnographic material: mundane long- and short-term decisions, official urban planning practices, business development plans, strategy papers of local social clubs and associations, private and public investment plans, the conceptualisation and organisation of future socio-cultural projects and so forth. It also comprises more intimate aspects: personal future prospects, expectations of one's children's or grandchildren's outmigration, individual feelings of fear, hope, and despair, issues of trust, a lack of self-confidence, or the constricted capacity to envision one's own life in the future.

A practice-based approach to time *and* knowledge as much as to time *as* knowledge (cf. Rabinow, 1986) throws light on the way the future is made to play a role in local life. It has a longstanding tradition in the discipline of anthropology. As Gell, again, has it, claims to time are part of the 'continuous production of socially useful knowledge' (Gell, 1992: 304), a set of 'contingent beliefs', which he successfully poses against 'the doctrine of temporal 'mentalities' or 'world-views'' (both Gell, 1992: 55).

Carol Greenhouse pushes this approach to time further: Since 'social time has no practical existence or intrinsic logic apart from its contexts of use', (Greenhouse, 1996: 212) we must attend 'the multiple ways in which the nature and meaning of time are indeterminate even in contexts where its representation is most explicit' (Greenhouse, 1996: 221).

Since anthropology's defining methodology of fieldwork is inherently presentist, it is hard to discern the 'temporal property' of whatever we study by including its pasts and future, especially if that object's endurance is subject to a context of accelerated change and continuously changing retrospective scrutiny. Historians with a long-term historical perspective, in contrast, can arguably at least claim to be able to represent the past. However, this does not change the fact that in any given moment they could not have foreseen what was to happen afterwards. To retrospectively attribute this 'temporality' as if particular aspects of human life were to endure or to change independent of human practice is not only theoretically dubious; it is part of a deterministic fallacy. In the next section, I expand on the theory of presentism in order to show how to circumvent such fallacies.

The Construction of 'Temporality'

In the metaphysics of time, presentism is the account of time which holds that only the present exists while the past and future are in some way unreal; it is contrasted with eternalism which holds that the past, present and future are equally real. Accordingly, presentism resembles the approach of most anthropologists discussed above who hold that both the past and the future do not exist other than in their representations in the present. Kirsten Hastrup's 1990 definition of ethnographic

presentism similarly argues that this form of presentism is not just a literary device; it is the essentially presentist methodological approach to our material which entails our discipline's 'necessary construction of time' (1990: 45). Pushed to the extreme, as Gell so convincingly showed in his discussion of the temporal quality of the Magna Carta, it does not matter from an anthropological point of view whether this document dates from 1215 or not. What matters is how people attach meaning to it, i.e. whatever temporality or historicity they construct in their respective presents.

However, ethnographic presentism faces a particular problem. It can easily be countered by scholars who emphasize the past in their analysis of the present, some of whom I have already mentioned above. In their view, the present might indeed be open to the future, but it came to be the way it is through a long and complex process of historical causation. Hence, for them, it would be important to read, for example, the post-socialist present through the lens of the socialist past or to give people without history their own history. Rather than using local invocations of the past as an analytical contrast foil for eliciting their significance in the present, they are imbuing the present with a temporal property we might refer to as a historically determined temporality. This seriously downplays the influence the future might have in the present; it also gives the present a rather limited character as only a momentary pause in an ever continuous process of causation. As indicated above, the theory of presentism convincingly reconciles the future and the past with the present.

In 2006 the philosopher Craig Bourne published a monograph called *A Future for Presentism*. I will spare you the much debated philosophical detail and only focus on his discussion of the deterministic fallacy. Regarding the future, Bourne points out something that most of us, I suppose, would happily agree with: Given a certain degree of contingency and indeterminacy, at any moment in time we face the probable emergence of a variety of

possible futures. This seems commonsensical and relates to the not-yet-real character of the future. However, even the fact that only one of all of these possible futures turns out to become the present (in the future) does not mean that this future (present) was predetermined to become present, i.e. that it somewhat pre-existed and then inevitably emerged in the future present. To take such an ex post facto construction as true constitutes a deterministic fallacy (cf. Bourne, 2006: 60f). This view arises because, in comparison with the future, the past is widely presumed to have another ontological status (cf. Ringel, 2016). Since it has once existed, it is seen to have had another temporal property than other potential pasts (respectively past futures), namely those which have not been realised. It is supposed that it was this particular temporal property, which made this past become a present. From a deterministic point of view, it is thus only the future-to-be that leans into – and has effects on – the present. But if we accept Bourne’s claim that the actual future, which turned out to become the present, was at no point predetermined to become the present, then all past presents were not ontologically predetermined either. This is not to say that due to the non-existence of the future ‘presentists should treat the past in the same way’ (Bourne, 2006: 41). The actual past did in some way indeed exist, namely once as a present. However, I precisely challenge the ontological status we attach to this past in the present – its contemporary quality. As we see, the important point about the actual past is that – as with any present – it was not predetermined to come into existence. This temporal property is not changed by the fact that it has done so.

It goes without saying that such a view caters conveniently to practice theory, phenomenological approaches and the methodology of fieldwork. This focus on the present also leaves us luckily barehanded when it comes to causation. It does not disallow comparison with the past. But more importantly, it allows the in-depth attendance to all temporal relations and experiences to be found in our fieldsites’ presents. The construction of particular temporal properties is thereby included, but

only on our informants' side. Let me give you yet other ethnographic examples of the local construction of such temporal attributions. Importantly, it is obviously a chain of different presents that we are able to encounter throughout fieldwork. This will, however, not alter the continuously indeterminate temporal existence of our objects of analysis. As the experiences of my informants prove: any future might hold various surprises, as past futures have already done.

One often repeated story in Hoyerswerda refers to the unexpected functional change of a particular house in the old city. Many informants saw this change to be indicative of the dramatic demographic changes their city was undergoing. Originally planned as a residential home for the elderly in the 1950s during Neustadt's construction, the intended use of this building faced a peculiar problem: there just were not enough old people around. The city's age average was as low as 27 years. The planners were quickly convinced that the building was to become a kindergarten, which it continued to be until the mid-1990s. Now, since Hoyerswerda has become demographically speaking one of Germany's oldest cities with an age average above 50, this house has found a new, or rather, it has found its old function – and finally reopened as a home for the elderly thus evading its own deconstruction. Its actual use at no point was predetermined by the characteristics it was imbued with; in new presents it had to answer to new possible futures.

I argue that it is the aspect of such stories' unexpected turns that should be taken analytically more seriously in our accounts of the present. Consider the case of the art works of Hoyerswerda's First Sculptors' Symposium. Located in WK 9, one of the youngest districts and after WK 10 the one most severely effected by demolition, they once materialised the claims to a rather different future. As its centrepiece daringly wishes: 'Happiness should always spread its wings over the city of Hoyerswerda'. Again,

in 1970, when this popular symposium was conducted, such a sculpted speech act was felicitous. With at first the district and then its shopping centre severely deteriorating in the late 1990s, these sculptures seemed lost – stuck in a different past with a different future, as was their immediate built environment. Meanwhile, due to unexpected federal funding city officials and the communal housing companies have moved the whole symposium to the remaining clearance area of Hoyerswerda's first demolished apartment house in WK 2. There, they have been paired up with high mirrors, becoming other pieces of art, in yet another context. They definitely seem more secure there; as with the apartments blocks surrounding them: their future existence seems to be procured through recent investments.

These two examples of the local epistemic production of particular objects' temporal qualities are part of a large variety of local temporal attributions, many of which are directed towards the future. Such attributions are a central part of processes of communal self-assurance. They quickly enter Hoyerswerda's many socio-political negotiations. One very last example is the fight for a future for the building Braugasse 1, the former Children and Youth Club located in the centre of the Old Town, which was originally opened as a Ball Room in the late 19th century. This building had been closed according to German building law in 1998, indeed, approximately one hundred years after its erection. Throughout the first decade of the 21st century it was in continuous danger of either being demolished or replaced by an apartment house for pensioners. Its insecure future sparked the formation of the activist group Braugasse 1 e.V., which was aimed at giving the building a different future, or rather a future in the first place. This unexpectedly successful civic intervention changed the building's existence in time. As I describe elsewhere (Ringel, 2014), throughout the club members' endless efforts, the building's various re-narrated pasts and newly envisioned futures were led into the field

of contestation by all people concerned, but especially by the supporters of a swift renovation. The building's existence in time was stressed, foremost its long history of socio-cultural importance, in order to claim its right for the future. As a property of the building, this fabricated temporality, a well-defined futurity, had to be imposed, since its material property depended urgently on actual physical support. After all, a "normal" building is only built for 80 till 100 years. To many peoples' surprise, this building was indeed saved and is by now fully renovated and reopened as a socio-cultural centre in a city still continuously deteriorating. The social construction and imposition of temporality, again, suggests that the issue of time forcefully poses itself as a matter of contested knowledge practices, imbued with local relevance, and their effects. If we as anthropologists want to intervene in these constructions, then we should attend such relevance. The theory of presentism, as I have argued, might provide a valuable theoretical framework for this.

Conclusion: Towards a Non-Ontology of Time

The ways in which people relate to the future are not fixed and stable. Indeed, there is no time as such and there are, I argue, no discrete temporalities. Rather, such temporal matters evolve in (and are reproduced by) everyday practice, in which all things social, political and ethical are at stake. In my work, I understand the relation between time and knowledge in two different ways. First, I chart the ways in which knowledge (in content, form and practice) changes over time: new concepts emerge, are negotiated, and have particular effects (cf. Hirsch and Stewart 2005). I hold that this process is indeterminate. Second, I consider the temporal dimension of knowledge as the many different ways in which people reach out in time to the past or the future, both

near and far. Despite their own conditions of possibility, I also hold these temporal knowledge practices not to be fully determined. This approach to time does not deploy the concept of a discrete temporality as attributed to particular objects, forms, groups, and social relations. Instead of discovering some inherent quality of how these objects of anthropological analysis exist in time, I approach issues of time via the knowledge that is produced by, or the politics that are done with, them, via the effects this knowledge has, and its own indeterminate existence in time. I thereby accept Bourne's argument against deterministic fallacies by claiming that nothing has a temporal character for a presentist apart from being (in the) present.

If we take Barbara Adam's aforementioned claim that '[a]ny reality that transcends the present must itself be exhibited in it' (1990: 38) seriously, we stay inherently presentist in our analysis. As Marilyn Strathern has it in her *Partial Connections*, 'in one sense, everything is in place: sociality, the values, relationships. But what must be constantly made and remade, invented afresh, are the forms in which such things are to appear' (Strathern, 1991: 98). I include in this ongoing process of explication the many temporal considerations that bear relevance in my fieldsite, presuming that 'time' is already in place. In this vein, we can analytically transcend the simple 'recognition that people make history in conditions outside their control' (Adam, 1990: 98) and treat the role of the past and the future in present temporal practices in Strathern's formulation as 'a concern with representation, with how people make things known to themselves' (Strathern, 2005: 42). Time, as Arjun Appadurai has pointed out, is as much part of the *Production of Locality* (1995) as spatial concerns; locality (including temporal embeddedness) thereby is not 'a non-negotiable here-and-now' (Appadurai 1995: 206). Munn (1992) even more forcefully demands us to attend practices of strategic temporalisation as indicative of 'ways in which time is not merely

'lived,' but 'constructed' in the living' (Munn, 1992: 109). Her term of temporalisation might be helpful in this regard: it 'views time as a symbolic process continually being produced in everyday practices' (Munn, 1992: 116). Such processes of production of temporal knowledge are open to political conflict and social negotiation. Indeed, particularly the city's problematic present incites a broad variety of temporal references. Because the process of shrinkage has profoundly challenged its inhabitants' self-understanding, manifold ideas, interpretations and imaginations drawn from different pasts (post-socialist, socialist as well as pre-socialist, for that matter) and directed towards competing future visions have become essential tools for dealing with the current changes. Whether in private or public discourses, the contemporary problematisation of life invites conflicting temporal notions.

By analytically emphasising the future as an important experiential dimension, I have countered the clear-cut linear temporal narrative of post-socialist transition, taking theories on the influence of the post-socialist and other pasts, literally, into the future – or rather into the present. Importantly, I am not imposing yet another temporality. The philosophical presentism shortly discussed only helped me to see how ethnographic presentism can be given increased analytical value. I am in no way advocating what Jane Guyer so convincingly criticizes as some form of neo-liberal 'enforced presentism' paired with 'fantasy futurism' (Guyer, 2007: 409f). Nor am I endorsing some idea of 'enforced futurism', which is so suggestively tenable in my shrinking fieldsite. Rather, with the help of the anthropology of the future, I have proposed a new perspective on present matters whilst nevertheless being aware of the analytic as much as political value of historical analyses. Due to our presentist methodology, however, we as anthropologists should be careful when prescribing temporal properties and all-encompassing temporal logics to whatever we study. Therefore, I propose a presentist

exploration of the role time in general as well as the past and especially the future are made to play in the present.

Moreover, if we analytically uphold the contingent and indeterminate quality of our objects of analysis (may they be social institutions and relations or socialist apartment blocks), we might be able to focus more thoroughly on their endurance. Indeed, I find that much more fascinating than their change, i.e. to attend the, in my eyes always surprising, social, epistemic and actual maintenance work of my informants and the only ever retrospectively reconstructable persistence or stubbornness of any given object of analysis (Ringel, 2014). As Hodges (2008) could hopefully agree to in his Deleuzian inspired temporal ontology of flux, endurance, then, is not a property of a given object, but something continuously made and facilitated. Change, for that matter, does not happen at random due to some ominous temporal or historical force; like continuity it is subject to ever new and indeterminate presents.

Most importantly, I am also not abandoning the study of time by critically engaging with the category of temporality. In contrast, I am arguing for temporally expanding our analyses. However, there is a clear-cut difference between attending to a variety of temporal notions and the analytical prescription of temporality. The way people exist in time, amongst other things, also depends on practices of representation and variously imaginable forms of temporal agency; it should not be presumed as an ontological given.

With that in mind, I return to Hoyerswerda Neustadt for the last time, more precisely to WK 10, the district that I did *not* start my paper with. Despite many artistic and socio-cultural temporary interventions in – and subsequent late revivals of – some of the WK 10 blocks, virtually all of them but one have found their retrospectively logical, yet radical destination in their own destruction. Their windows have been taken

to some Eastern European country to be included in new apartment houses; the rubble remaining from its walls was expensively sold for the erection of new infrastructure projects like roads and bridges. However, at one of these temporary uses, the socio-cultural project 'Out of Time' or 'TimeOut' (in German: 'Auszeit'), something unforeseen happened yet again.

As the organizers pointed out, the project specifically focused on Hoyerswerda's present – for a change – and not on its future. In one of its workshops, a group of people came up with a new idea for the blocks' ultimate survival. They had in mind the realization of at least one of the two following ideas: Either, they wanted to produce a QR code path through WK 10 and all other areas of deconstruction. Once attached to remaining trees and lampposts, these black-and-white squared matrix barcodes will store old images and other information about the demolished buildings, rendering them accessible in future presents by any smartphone user. Or else they wanted to create an app, which allows for the real-time production of a so-called 'augmented reality' of WK 10's past. Any future visitor will then be able to virtually see how these blocks looked like and where exactly they stood. Somewhat uncannily, the blocks could then – with the help of this new technology – forever belong to *the present*, i.e. to all of the presents yet to come. Although, alternatively, the proposed technology might also soon be out of fashion and this high-fly representation of the past might disappear in the internet's endless oblivion. Or the idea might never be realized in the first place. We cannot know.

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